

Guinea

Guinea's landscape is spectacular. The country has some of the world's few remaining tropical dry forests, and the rainforests that remain in the south are lush and verdant and full of wildlife. The waterfall-rich Fouta Djallon Plateau in the west has breathtaking scenery and some of the best hiking in West Africa. Guinea is not well endowed with beaches, but those it has are superb; and often empty.

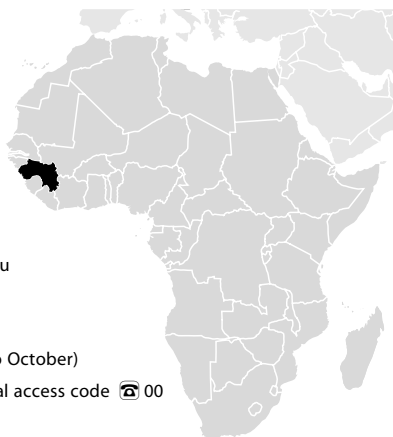
Geography is a mistress both cruel and kind to Guinea. Cruel because this country is something of an overlander dead end, very tough to reach from the north and blocked by Côte d'Ivoire's civil war in the south. And kind because Guinea's landscape is naturally blessed – hence the bottomless love Guineans have for their country and their mystification and anger that it continues to be among the poorest in the world.

Matching Guinea's beauty is its vibrant culture. Across the country there's a strong tradition of music and dance, and visitors have many opportunities to see performances. Also, thanks largely to Sekou Touré's impassioned defiance of the French, most Guineans are as proud of their nationality as they are of their ethnicity. They have stood together through the difficult decades of independence instead of turning on each other.

Guinea is not as prepared for tourism as some other West African countries, and beyond the capital creature comforts are sparse. You won't always have to rough it upcountry, but as long as you're prepared for the possibility, a visit here can be very rewarding.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 245,855 sq km
- **ATMs** There's one in Conakry
- **Borders** Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone open. Côte d'Ivoire open but not advised
- **Budget** US\$10 to US\$20 per day
- **Capital** Conakry
- **Languages** French, Malinke, Pulaar (Fula), Susu
- **Money** Guinean franc; US\$1 = GFr5640
- **Population** 9.5 million
- **Seasons** Dry (November to May), wet (June to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 224; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visas** Required for all, except residents of Economic Community of West Africa States (Ecowas) countries, Morocco and Tunisia; must be bought before arrival



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Fouta Djallon** (p364) Ramble through the rolling green landscape, one of West Africa's best trekking destinations.
- **Bossou** (p367) Watch chimpanzees living in the forest around this village – they're fairly easy to find.
- **Forêt Classée de Ziam** (p366) Track elephants through virgin rainforest.
- **Sobané & Îles de Los** (p364 & p362) Laze around plenty of palm-fringed sands, or, on weekends, live it up a little.
- **Conakry** (p360) Groove to the capital's sparkling music scene.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Guinea is one of the wettest countries in West Africa – Conakry receives over 4m of rain, half of it in July and August, while the central mountainous region receives about 2m, more evenly distributed between June and October. Temperatures average 30°C along the coast, where it is always humid, and can fall to 10°C and below at night in Mali-ville and other highland areas during winter.

The best time to visit is November and December, after the rains but before the dusty harmattan winds spoil the views. The rains sometimes make minor roads impassable, though there's something to be said for visiting the Fouta Djallon when it's wet. The rains, which generally don't last very long, make the waterfalls more explosive and the countryside more verdant, while the clouds lower the daytime temperatures.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Either see Conakry (p360) and hit the beach at Îles de Los (p362), or head to Dalaba (p364) for a look at the Fouta Djallon.
- **One Week** Spend a day or two in Conakry (p360) and the rest of your time exploring the Fouta Djallon (p364). If beaches are more your thing, you can sample both Îles de Los (p3762) and Sobané (p364) instead of the mountains.

HISTORY

Guinea's story is tragically familiar: the post-independence promise of a socialist utopia, the slide down the slippery slope to xenophobic isolation and murderous cultural revolution, and more recently the transformation into ramshackle klepto-capitalism. As the current

HOW MUCH?

- **Raffia backpack** US\$0.70
- **100km taxi brousse ride** US\$3
- **World Cola** US\$0.25
- **Two pagnes (about 2m) of hand-woven indigo cloth** US\$7
- **A night at a music show** US\$1.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.90
- **1.5L of bottled water** US\$0.40
- **Bottle of Skol** US\$0.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$6
- **Bag of groundnuts** US\$0.02

regime slips into senility, Guineans have their hearts in their mouths: is life set to improve at last, or is chaos just around the corner?

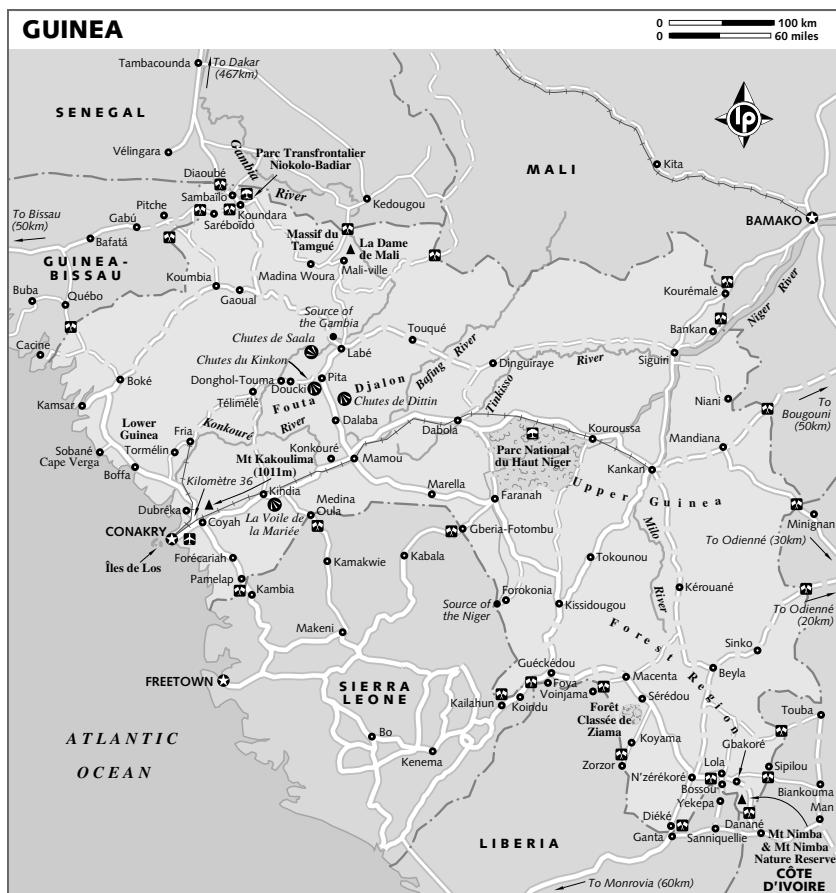
Poverty in Liberty

Guinea was part of the Mali empire, which covered a large part of western Africa between the 13th and 15th centuries. From the mid-1400s Portuguese and other European traders settled Guinea's coastal region, and the country eventually became a French colony in 1891.

The end of French West Africa began with Guinea. It was granted independence in 1958 under the leadership of Sekou Touré, who rejected a French offer of membership in a commonwealth and demanded total independence, declaring 'We prefer poverty in liberty to riches in slavery'. French reaction was swift: financial and technical aid was cut off, and there was a massive flight of capital.

Sekou Touré decided to model Guinea on the revolutionary Chinese pattern, collectivising farms and industries. It was an unmitigated disaster, and his paranoia triggered a reign of terror. 'Conspiracies' were detected in one group after another, and dissidents were either imprisoned or executed. By the end of the 1960s over 250,000 Guineans lived in exile.

Towards the end of his presidency Touré changed many of his policies. A major influence was the Market Women's Revolt of 1977, in which several police stations were destroyed and some local governors were



killed, as part of the fight against state plans to discourage private trade.

Democracy's Disappointments

Touré died in March 1984. Days later a military coup was staged by a group of colonels, including Lansana Conté, who became president. He introduced austerity measures, and in 1991 bowed to pressure to introduce a multiparty political system. Presidential elections were held in late 1993 amid tight security and official secrecy. Conté won with 51% of the vote, and in the elections of December 1998 was re-elected with 56%; accusations of fraud accompanied both campaigns. Not long after, Conté's main rival was detained and imprisoned for alleged sedition.

In November 2001 a nationwide constitutional referendum, also marred by irregularities, repealed the two-term limit for presidents and lengthened the term from five to seven years, effectively setting up Conté as president for life. Not surprisingly, he won the December 2003 election. Key opposition leaders, citing government obstruction, boycotted both this and the earlier parliamentary elections.

Guinea Today

Conté, a chain-smoking diabetic, has rarely appeared in public since before the 2003 election and has reportedly been on his deathbed several times. A united opposition has urged the ailing septuagenarian to resign for the sake of the nation and proposed a transitional

government. Conté has ignored their advice and it appears he has not planned for his succession.

Today Guinea faces an unknown future. Despite rising mining revenue (Guinea holds over 30% of the world's bauxite), the economy is faltering and there have been some anti-government street protests. Some observers, including the International Crisis Group, say Guinea is in danger of becoming a failed state. Others cite the Guineans' unity and abhorrence of violence and predict that whatever happens will be peaceful.

CULTURE

When Guinean women get together they complain about the rapid rise of prices in the market. With men, the conversation invariably turns to football. Both topics reflect the harsh reality of life in Guinea today. While men have always talked about football, there was once also plenty of debate about politics and corruption. It's not the fear of the police state that has silenced them, they've just grown tired of the topics.

Despite a wealth of resources, 40% of the population lives below the poverty line. Nobody expects life to change much when a new dictator (democracy is just a dream) takes over, though many figure it just has to get better. '*Le Guinéen est têtu*' – the Guinean is stubborn – is a common refrain and they await their future eagerly, anxiously...but mostly silently.

PEOPLE

Guinea's population is about 9.5 million, including a large but dwindling refugee population from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The main groups are Susu in the coastal area, and Malinke and Peul in the centre and north. About 85% of the population is Muslim, 8% Christian, with the remainder following local religions. There is little religious discord in the country and mixed families are not uncommon.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Socialism was an economic disaster, but the government's emphasis on nationalist *authenticité* in the arts, and state patronage of artistic institutions, was a boon. Notable Guinean musicians include Mory Kanté, famous for his 'kora funk' style, and the guitarist Sékou Diabaté, aka Diamond Fingers. Camara Laye, author of *L'Enfant Noir* (aka *The African Child*

or *The Dark Child*) is the country's best-known export, though Le Ballets Africains and Circus Baobab have made names for themselves on international tours.

You can visit indigo and mud cloth (or forest cloth) cooperatives in many towns.

ENVIRONMENT

Visitors – and Guineans – are constantly amazed that a country so naturally well endowed can be poorer than its parched northern neighbours. Guinea has four distinct zones: a narrow coastal plain, the Fouta Djallon Plateau, northeastern dry lowlands and the Forest Region (Guinée Forestière) of the southeast. The Fouta Djallon Plateau, rising to over 1500m, is the source of the Gambia and Senegal Rivers and of much of the Niger River (although the actual source of the Niger River lies to the south, near the Sierra Leone border).

Forêt Classée de Ziam, where the rainforest remains pristine and elephants are often spotted, is the top park to visit. The nearby Mt Nimba Nature Reserve is a Unesco World Heritage Site, but this didn't stop the government from opening an iron mine on the mountainside. The two national parks, Parc Transfrontalier Niokolo-Badiar and Parc National du Haut Niger, are seldom visited and pretty poorly protected. Inquire at the **Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Faune** (Route de Donka, Conakry) before making a trip to either.

Guinea's environmental record is atrocious. Much of the coastal mangrove forest has been cleared for rice production and deforestation is so rampant that the Forest Region really ought to adopt a new name. Large mining companies have pledged to improve their practices and there is some evidence this is happening.

FOOD & DRINK

Outside Conakry there are few proper restaurants (except those at hotels, which primarily cook European-style), though most towns have one or two basic eating houses doing cheap meals of rice and sauce, and lots of street-food vendors dishing up rice for breakfast and lunch, and grilled meat at night. The most common sauces are made of manioc leaves (*feuille de manioc*) and groundnuts (*patate*). Every cook has crushed peppers or pepper sauce for you to add to your dish.

Guinea is fortunate enough to have a real coffee tradition: *café noir* is a bit like espresso and is served in small cups with lots of sugar.

CONAKRY

Conakry is a city with a somewhat split personality. It has an erratic infrastructure and growing crime rate so, like with many cities living under rotten regimes, a visit here can be frustrating for travellers. On the other hand, Conakry is an undeniably pulsating place: colourful, spontaneous, friendly, musical, a little wild, and always full of contrast. The city's vibrancy and openness come from a very African flavour. These more subtle charms are likely to grow on you with time and many people end up loving the city by the time they leave. It's tailor-made for a (long) weekend blast.

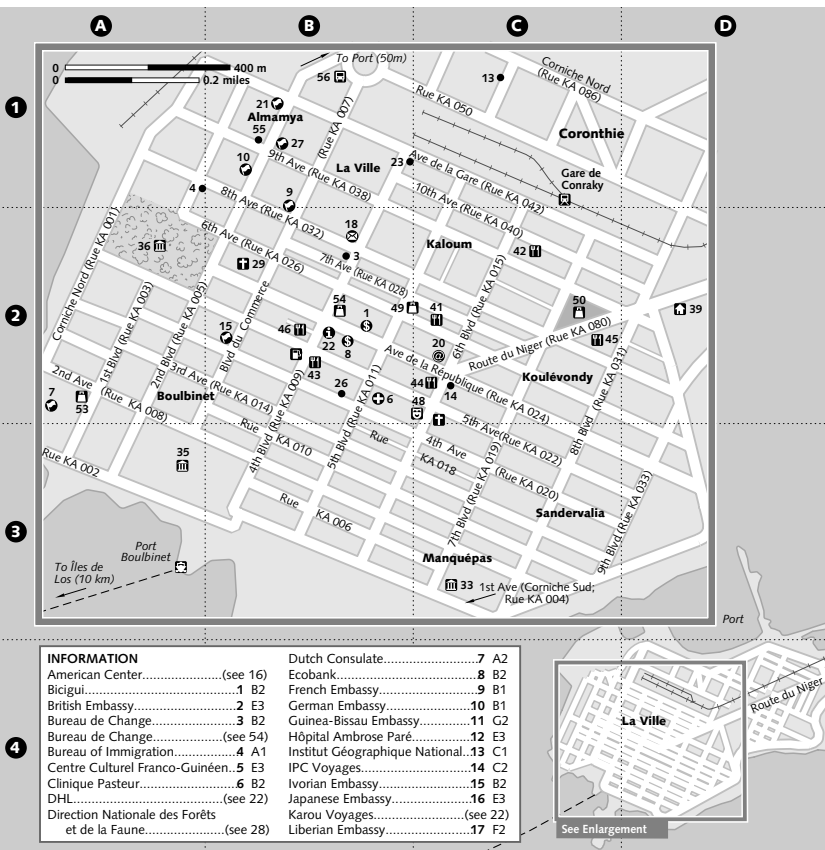
HISTORY

Conakry was one of colonial France's major ports in West Africa and was for a time known as the 'Paris of Africa'. Little of that glamour remains. What is now central Conakry was an island in the 19th century, until it was bridged at the site of the Palais du Peuple.

ORIENTATION

Conakry is a long, narrow city, built on the Kaloum Peninsula. In the city centre you'll find the banks, airline offices, several restaurants and some hotels. About 2km out of the city centre the peninsula narrows, and at Place du 8 Novembre the road divides: Route de Donka to the north, leading to the buzzing Camayenne neighbourhood; Corniche

CONAKRY



Sud to the south; and the Autoroute up the middle. About 10km north of the city centre are the lively Rogbané and Taouyah *quartiers* (neighbourhoods). Central Conakry has two sets of street names. We've used the old names in the text, though the Conakry map shows both old and new.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Soguidip (4th Ave) Has some English-language magazines, as do street traders along Ave de la République.

Cultural Centres

American Center (☎ 454486; Corniche Sud, Coléah) Shows African and Western films.

Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen (☎ 013-409625;

Corniche Nord) Programs French-language theatre and cinema, arranges drum and dance lessons, and houses a library and internet facility. There's free live music on Wednesday night.

Internet Access

Cybercafés with fast connections (usually about US\$1.50 per hour) are easily found. The following are large, with modern computers and air-conditioning, and are open daily.

Cyber Ratoma (Route de Donka, Ratoma)

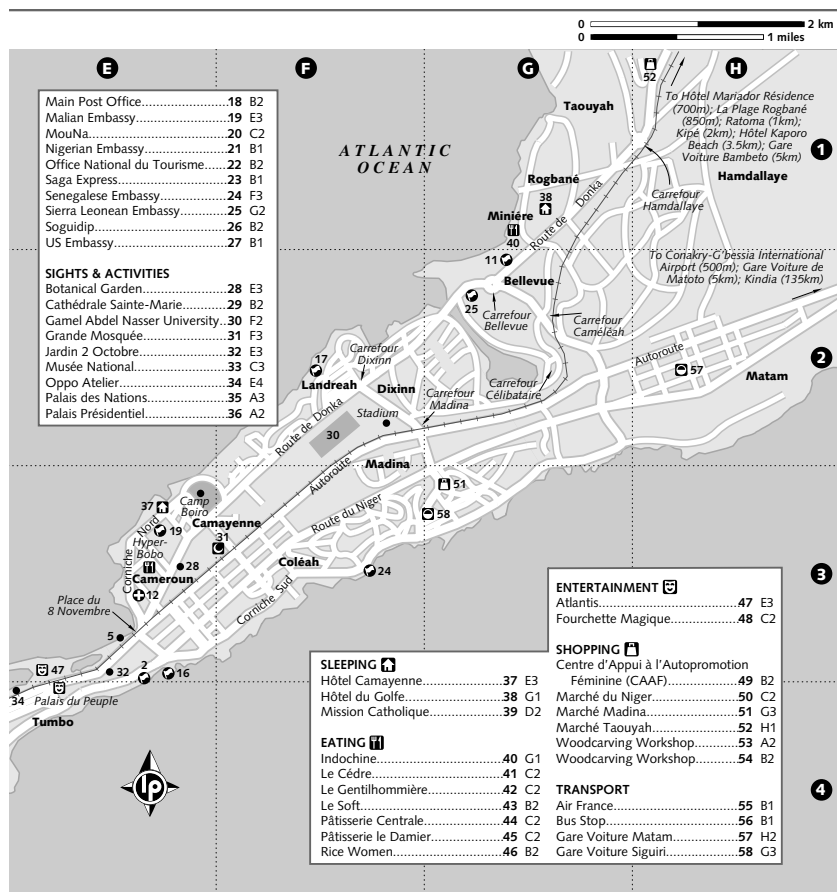
MouNa (Ave de la République, La Ville)

Medical Services

Clinique Pasteur (☎ 747576; 5th Blvd) In the city centre.

Hôpital Ambrose Paré (☎ 011-211320; Dixinn)

Considered the best in Guinea.



Money

Men offering to change money line Ave de la République, though it's best to go to one of the bureaux de change. There are several along 4th Blvd.

Bicigui (Ave de la République) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM (available 24 hours) that accepts Visa cards.

Ecobank (Ave de la République) Just across the street from Bicigui, this bank has better hours (open Saturday) and slightly better exchange rates, but the rates still fall below what you will get from private moneychangers.

Post

DHL (4th Blvd)

Main post office (4th Blvd) To collect a letter from the disorganised poste restante you must open an account (US\$3).

Saga Express (4th Blvd) The agent for FedEx.

Tourist Offices

Office National du Tourisme (☎ 455163; <http://ont.guinee.free.fr>; 2nd fl, Karou Voyages Bldg, Ave de la République) An administrative centre rather than an information point, but staff will endeavour to assist you if asked.

Travel Agencies

These Ave de la République agencies are long established and very professional.

IPC Voyages (☎ 455662; www.ipctravel.net/ipcgn.htm; Ave de la République)

Karou Voyages (☎ 452042; Ave de la République)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

As the economy disintegrates, petty and violent crime is rising. It's best to take a taxi at night and, as always, be careful around crowded public places such as the airport and the markets. Also watch out for bag snatchers reaching in to open car windows. The whole Madina quartier has a bad reputation for crime.

After midnight checkpoints are set up at Place du 8 Novembre and by the Japanese embassy, the two routes to and from central Conakry, and it's common for the soldiers manning them to seek bribes. As long as you have your papers in order you shouldn't have to pay anything if you're riding in a taxi. In your own car, most people simply pay US\$0.25 up front to avoid protracted discussion. If the soldiers are drunk, the going rate is US\$1.20.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Musée National** (☎ 415060; 7th Blvd; admission US\$0.25; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) has a modest but interesting collection of masks, statues and

musical instruments. Woodworkers and drum-makers work on the museum grounds while the welders at **Oppe Atelier** (Corniche Nord) forge funky sculptures from scrap metal. Also worth taking a look at are the two large mosaics at **Gamal Abdel Nasser University** (Route de Donka).

The gigantic concrete **Grande Mosquée** in Camayenne can accommodate 10,000 worshippers; you may be able to see inside if you arrange it with the adjoining Islamic Centre. Sekou Touré's grave is in the mosque grounds. Conakry's yellow and red **Cathédrale Sainte-Marie** (Bldv du Commerce) is less impressive, but still beautiful. Behind it is the **Palais Présidentiel**. The **Palais des Nations** (2nd Ave) was going to be the venue for the Organisation of African Unity conference in 1984, which was cancelled when Sekou Touré died. It has been in ruin since the February 1996 army rebellion.

The **Botanical Garden** (Route de Donka) is the coolest place in the city, though not the cleanest. Many families gather in **Jardin 2 Octobre** (Corniche Nord) on weekends.

The **Îles de Los** (about 10km southwest of Conakry) were once used as a way station for British slave traders. The good swimming beaches fill up on weekends and there are worthy walks, especially on Île de Kassa. Several of Conakry's fanciest hotels run weekend boats; alternatively, overcrowded *pirogues* (traditional canoes; up to US\$1) leave regularly from Port Boulbinet, near Palais des Nations.

SLEEPING

Mission Catholique (☎ 343655; traore_celestine@yahoo.fr; Route du Niger; s/d with fan from US\$7/10.50, s/d with air-con US\$11.50/17.50; ☎) Friendly, spotless, well run, and close to the city centre. Booking in advance is a near necessity.

Pension La Maison Blanche (signposted off Route de Donka, Kipé; r with fan US\$9.50) Good value in a quiet location. The Amoussou drum and dance troupe next door welcomes visitors.

Hôtel du Golfe (☎ 421394; off Route de Donka, Minière; r from US\$15, ste \$29; ☎) Nothing fancy, but it's run as professionally as more expensive hotels.

Hôtel Kaporo Beach (☎ 527978; signposted off Route de Donka, Kaporo; r US\$21; ☎) This place features bright and spotless rooms with a patio view that will make you forget you're in a city. Good restaurant, too.

Pension Les Palmiers (☎ 421103; Route de Donka, Ratoma; s/d US\$23/28; 🍽️) Known to most as Pension Ghussein, after the delightful French owner, it's very homey and has a sea-side patio.

Hôtel Mariador Résidence (☎ 011-333535; residence@mariador.com; off Rue RO 128, Taouyah; s/d US\$28-333; 🍽️ 📺) A popular hotel with a sea-side terrace, pool (US\$3.50 for nonguests) and comfortable rooms.

Hôtel Camayenne (☎ 012-664848; Corniche Nord, Camayenne; s/d from US\$130/150; 🍽️ 📺 📺) Right on the ocean with a pleasant pool and bar area, plus fitness centre and tennis courts.

Accommodation on the islands spans from simple to swish. Ask at the beach on tiny Île Room for Sinny or Kalla, who run **Foré-Foté** (r around US\$3.50) in the village along with their drumming school. **Le Magellan** (☎ 422022; r US\$49; 🍽️ Oct-mid-Jun; 🍽️ 📺) on Île de Kassa is owned by the same people as Hôtel Océane in Conakry. They can organise return transport for \$US4.60.

EATING

Street food, such as grilled meat and *attiéké* (cassava couscous), is available in and around Marché du Niger, Marché Taouyah near Cinéma Rogbané and in front of Hôtel Camayenne. During lunchtime a slew of women serve bowls of rice and sauce for US\$1 or less at several spots just south of Ave de la République. Several Lebanese places on or close to Ave de la République serve *shwarma* (grilled meat in bread) for just a little more. Hôtels Kaporo Beach and Mariador Residence draw diners as much for the seaside settings as the food.

Le Soft (4th Blvd; mains US\$1.20-2.50; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) A little dive that packs people in for dishes from around West Africa.

Le Waffou (Route de Donka, Kipé; mains US\$1.20-5; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) A colourful spot serving Ivorian food under thatch-roofed huts. A drum and dance troupe performs on Friday nights.

Pâtisserie Centrale (6th Blvd; mains US\$1.20-7; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Burgers, sandwiches and pizza are on the menu.

La Plage Rogbané (Rue RO 128, Taouyah; mains US\$2.50-5; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) This simple, hard-to-find beachfront bar is becoming a magnet for seafood lovers.

Pâtisserie le Damier (Route du Niger; mains from US\$3; 🍽️ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Delicious French

meals, handmade baked goods (pastries from US\$0.25) and chocolate, and an all-you-can-eat Saturday brunch. It successfully pulls off a Parisian vibe.

Le Gentilhomme (10th Ave; mains US\$3.50-7; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) A wide variety of African dishes served in a lovely bamboo, thatch and calabash interior.

San Remo (Route de Donka, Ratoma; mains US\$3.50-7; 🍽️ dinner Wed-Sun) Perhaps the best pizza in Guinea.

Le Cédre (7th Ave; mains US\$4-6.50; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) The best Lebanese food in town.

Indochine (Rue DI 777, Minière; mains US\$5.50-8; 🍽️ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily) Serves dishes from China, Thailand and Vietnam in a classy dining room.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Conakry nightclubs, which don't rumble before 11pm, are a lot of fun. Cover charges vary between US\$2 and US\$5. Of note are **Fourchette Magique** (6th Blvd), an intimate place with live jazz; **Wakili Guinée** (off Route de Donka, Ratoma; 🍽️ Thu-Sat), which does traditional music; and **Atlantis** (Corniche Nord, Tumbo), a flash expat favourite for dancing in Hôtel Riviera Royal.

SHOPPING

Marché Madina is one of West Africa's largest markets and there is little you can't find here, including some talented pickpockets. A walk through Marché du Niger is also quite an experience. The **Centre d'Appui à l'Autopromotion Féminine** (CAAF; 5th Blvd) women's cooperative outlet has a huge selection of interesting tie-dyed cloth. Woodcarving workshops are found around the city.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Conakry is served by two main *gares voitures* (bus and *taxi-brousse* park): Bambeto and Matam. In terms of destinations served, they're nearly the same (big buses to Kankan, Boké and N'zérékoré only use Matam). The biggest difference is that Bambeto is paved and more orderly while Matam is a bit busier, so *taxis brousses* (bush taxis) sometimes fill faster. *Taxis brousses* coming into Conakry drop passengers off along the main roads. For a few thousand francs (arrange this at your point of departure so everyone else in the taxi will keep the driver honest on the price), you can usually convince your driver to take you right to your hotel.

Leaving Guinea, you can get to Sierra Leone and Senegal from both Bambeto and Matam; for Mali use the Gare Voiture Siguiri in the Madina market. See p369 for further details.

GETTING AROUND

To hail a shared taxi around town just stand at the side of the road and shout your destination as the taxi passes, or ask someone to show you the appropriate hand signal. Taxis cost US\$0.15 per zone. The slightly cheaper minibuses (*magbanas*) work like taxis, only they're a lot slower. Buses, all of which rendezvous at the roundabout opposite the port, are very slow and infrequent.

If you want to charter a taxi (called *déplacement*), you'll need to find an empty one and then bargain hard: from central Conakry to the airport or Taouyah should cost around US\$3.50 during the day and US\$5.25 at night.

WESTERN GUINEA

Most travellers leaving Conakry stay on the bus as it rumbles along the main highway through Kindia, and even fewer turn north along the coast, but both have worthy natural attractions.

LOWER GUINEA

From **Dubréka** you can hire a large *pirogue* (about US\$35) to explore some wildlife-rich mangrove swamps, and swim below impressive (except February to May, when they dry up to a trickle) **Les Cascades de la Soumba** (admission US\$1.70). There's a nice **restaurant** (mains US\$2.30-6.50) at the falls and, nearby, six fully equipped **bungalows** (r incl breakfast US\$42; ☎).

In **Fria**, the affable staff at **Hôtel Yaskadi** (☎ 240984; off Route Unite; r with fan/air-con US\$3.50/7; ☎) will give directions to or arrange guides for the many caves in the surrounding hills. **Restaurant-Nightclub Le Kamsoum** (mains US\$2.30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner), a colourful place behind the mineworkers' apartments, is one of Fria's best restaurants. As midnight approaches, the dancing starts. *Taxis brousses* run frequently to the highway junction (US\$1.20, one hour) and occasionally to Témimé (US\$3.25, four hours), from where you can reach the Fouta Djallon.

About 25km from the highway is **Village Touristique Sobané** (☎ 011-545129; bungalows US\$18.50;

☎ Nov-Jun), with big thatch-roofed bungalows along a gorgeous stretch of sand. The restaurant is pretty good and the nightclub has dancing on weekends. You can sleep on its beach for \$US2.40. Pick-up trucks (\$US1.20) ply this road infrequently, and you'll need to pay extra for them to take you the last 5km.

Boké is a clean and orderly town where you can catch transport to Guinea-Bissau or Senegal. The **Fortin de Boké** (admission negotiable) museum has a small collection of artefacts, prison cells where rebellious slaves were kept before being sent overseas and a woodworking workshop. **Batafon Arts** (☎ 011-291116) offers drum and dance lessons. **Hôtel Filao** (☎ 310202; r with fan/air-con \$5.50/8; ☎) is the best-value lodging in town. **Restaurant Bibine** (meals US\$0.60-3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is open very early until very late. *Taxis brousses* go direct to Conakry (US\$5.50, three hours). For Labé you'll need to go to Kamsar where a taxi departs most mornings.

KINDIA

Kindia is Guinea's most crowded and hectic town outside Conakry. **La Voile de la Mariée** (Bridal Veil Falls; admission US\$0.20), best seen during or just after the rainy season, are 12km beyond town and 2km from the highway; any *taxi brousse* in that direction will drop you at the junction. There are aging **bungalows** (US\$6) available at the falls. Buses and *taxis brousses* go daily to/from Mamou (US\$3, three hours) and Conakry (US\$2.40, three hours). For Kamakwie (US\$6, seven hours) in Sierra Leone there is a departure about every other day.

FOUTA DJALON

Fouta Djallon's green rolling hills are more than a come-on for restless hiking boots, they're must-see Guinea. This undulant plateau is full of interesting villages and natural sites, and it's cooler than the lowlands.

DALABA

While there's nothing special about the town, Dalaba's peaceful location, overlooking a sweeping valley, is impressive, and it's a great base for **hiking** and **mountain biking** (for those who bring their own) through this postcard-perfect region. For an idea of routes, drop in at the **tourist office** (☎ 011-269348; Quartier des Chargeurs; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm); it has detailed guidebooks in

English and French about historic and natural sites such as **Case de Palabres**, decorated with Fula bas-relief designs, and **Chutes de Ditinn**, one of Guinea's tallest waterfalls. It also arranges guides (US\$10.50 per day for up to three people), village stays (US\$8 per night for up to three people) and motorcycle rentals (US\$7 per day).

There are some good craft outlets in town, including the **Association des Couturières de Tangama** for tie-dyed clothes and batiks.

The three places to stay are in the west half of town. **Hôtel Tangama** (☎ 691109; r US\$4.60, s/d with bathroom US\$7/9.50) is the most popular pick, while **Auberge Seidy II** (☎ 691063; r US\$6) is more homey. Both serve good food, and a cool drink enjoyed with the view from the terrace behind **Hôtel SIB** (☎ 695036) is sublime. On the west side of the market are several simple cafés.

Taxis brousses to and from Labé (US\$3.30, two hours) and Mamou (US\$1.70, one hour) pass through a few times a day.

DOUCKI

About 45km from Pita on the Téliélé road is the village of Doucki, where the one-of-a-kind Hassan Bah (who speaks English, French and Spanish) runs a guesthouse of sorts. Twelve dollars gets you lodging in a traditional Fula hut, three meals, and guided hikes to waterfalls and otherworldly slot canyons in and around what many call Guinea's Grand Canyon. *Taxis brousses* from Pita to Donghol-Touma (US\$2, 1½ hours) drop you 2km from the village.

LABÉ

Guinea's third-largest town is at the northern end of the sealed road through the Fouta Djallon. It's not particularly attractive, but it's a pleasant town with plenty of restaurants and services. The **Marché Central** has an Arab feel and lots of indigo cloth for sale, and **Le Petit Musée de Fouta** (admission by donation; ☎ 8am-6pm) east of the town centre has crafts and other regional tidbits. Not far from the museum you can discuss environmentalism and buy organic coffee at Alpha Bah's **Garden**. For good trekking you need to get pretty far out of the city. Madame Raby at Hôtel Tata has information and can arrange guides, and **Fouta Trekking Ventures** (☎ 011-231048) is building *campements* (camping grounds) using traditional designs in local villages.

Located near the main *gare voiture*, **Hôtel de l'Indépendance** (☎ 511000; r in annexe/main bldg

US\$2.40/\$6) has rooms in a dodgy annexe and a much better main building. **Hôtel Salam** (☎ 512472; r without bathroom US\$4.50, s/d with bathroom US\$7/\$8.5) is in a quiet quarter on the southeast side of town and many rooms have balconies. Chef Barry is a great cook and he takes requests. All the digs at the Italian-run **Hôtel Tata** (☎ 510540; r & huts US\$17.50) are cosy and spotless. Tata's pizza is fantastic, though the rest of the menu (pizza US\$2.50; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is a crapshoot. Street food is plentiful and there are several cheap restaurants near the *gare voiture*, like the exceptional **Le Calebasse** (mains US\$0.75-3.60; ☎ lunch & dinner).

Most buses and *taxis brousses*, including Mamou (US\$4, three hours) and Conakry (US\$8.50, eight hours), leave from the main *gare voiture* in the town centre. Vehicles heading to Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and even direct to The Gambia (US\$22) go from Gare Voiture Daka (shared taxis depart from near the mosque), 2km north of town.

SOUTHERN GUINEA

Few travellers spend any time here, other than making a quick stop in Kankan on the way to Mali. This is a mistake. There are some excellent wildlife-watching opportunities and several towns have their own appeal.

KANKAN

Kankan is Guinea's second city and a university town, but it's a quiet place. Set on the banks of the Milo River (a tributary of the great Niger River), the principal sights are the **Grande Mosquée**, which you can look around between prayer times, and **Villa Syli**, the old presidential palace overlooking the river. Many Malinke (Mandinka) people regard Kankan as their spiritual home as it was the site of two famous victories – one against French colonial forces – by the famed Samory Touré. Talk to **Millimouno 'Robert' Saa** (☎ 583128) at Makona Photocopy Centre across from Hôtel Uni if you are interested in seeing **traditional dancing** in surrounding villages.

Centre d'Accueil Diocésain (d US\$4.60) has some of the cleanest rooms in the city. Toilets are shared, but rooms have showers, sinks and nets, and even power most nights. **Hôtel Baté** (☎ 712368; annexe r with fan \$9, s/d US\$16.50/19; ☎) is the first choice of NGO workers, but **Hôtel Uni** (☎ 011-580414; r US\$14; ☎) offers better value.

THE LONG ROADS

The two roads into Senegal require more than the usual amount of travel stamina. The usual route goes from Labé through Koundara to Diaoubé (Senegal; US\$17), where you can connect to almost everywhere. Because the roads on the Guinean side are so bad, you rarely reach the border before it closes and end up sleeping there. Some taxis leave at night to avoid this hassle.

The road between Mali-ville and Kedougou (Senegal; US\$12, generally three trucks make the trip weekly in the dry season) is so pitiful that many people choose to walk across the border. Monsieur Souaré, who runs the **Bureau de Tourisme** (☎ 511739), has all the details on the six- to 12-hour downhill hike and can arrange boys to guide you and carry your bags. It's a beautiful trip.

Hôtel Baté (☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is also popular for meals. The delightful Mme Neass will prepare just about any West African dish with advance notice at her simple **Restaurant Sénégalais/Chez Mme Neass** (mains US\$0.50-1.20; ☎ lunch & dinner). **Le Baobab** (☎ lunch & dinner), in the field behind the university (look for the trees), is a popular little bar with students.

Taxis brousses for most destinations, including Conakry (US\$15, 13 hours), Kissidougou (US\$6, five hours) and N'zérékoré (US\$11, 12 hours) and Bamako (Mali; US\$15, seven hours), leave from the twin *gares voitures* near the bridge. There's also a smaller taxi stand north of the city centre for Dabola (US\$6, four hours).

KISSIDOUGOU

Kissidougou (often called Kissi) sits where the main road from Conakry divides north to Kankan and south to N'zérékoré. The little **Musée Préfectoral de Kissidougou** (admission US\$0.25; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) has some wonderful masks and other supposedly magical objects. Its staff can direct you to some fine vine bridges in area villages.

The nicest place for food and lodging is the flower-filled **Hôtel Savannah** (☎ 981040; r with fan/air-con & breakfast \$US8/10.50; ☎) along the highway. Pizza and seafood costs around US\$3.50. Friendly staff and a pleasant restaurant compensate for the cell-like rooms at **Hôtel de la Paix** (r US\$2), which is 300m east of the market.

Taxis brousses go daily to Kankan (US\$6, five hours) and Macenta (US\$5.50, five hours). For Conakry (US\$13, 12 hours), many taxis depart around 6pm.

MACENTA

The Forest Region begins in Kissidougou, but the area's beauty (what's left of it, anyway) really kicks in at Macenta. As you approach this

hilltop town you expect to find a lively and interesting city, but looks can be deceiving. Many people need to change taxis here, and if that requires spending the night, **Hôtel Palm** (☎ 526113; r US\$1.20-6) near the N'zérékoré *gare voiture* is your best bet. The cheapest rooms smell bad, but other classes are fine.

FORÊT CLASSÉE DE ZIAMA

One of Guinea's few remaining virgin rain-forests blankets the mountains 40km south of Macenta. Elephants are often spotted here, and you don't need a car to enter the forest. Guides and information are available at the headquarters in Sérédou, though they request that you call the **Centre Forestier** (☎ 910389) in N'zérékoré so the staff can prepare for your visit. Admission is US\$11.50 and the mandatory guide is another US\$3.50. Simple rooms at the office cost US\$2.50 per night. Any vehicle heading between Macenta and N'zérékoré can drop you off at the headquarters.

N'ZÉREKORÉ

N'zérékoré is the major city in the Forest Region. It's a lively place – a smuggling base, transport hub, refugee centre and southern Guinea's NGO central.

The **Musée Ethnographique** (admission US\$0.25; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-1pm Fri), between the stadium and market, is small but interesting. Ask here for directions to vine bridges in the surrounding area. You can watch crafts being made in the **artisan village** in the small 'sacred' forest at the northern entrance to town.

Hôtel Bakoly (☎ 910734; r US\$1.20-2.40), near the market, is as cheap as it gets. The basic rooms have a bucket shower and toilets are shared. The **Mission Catholique** (☎ 910897; r \$4.60), on the road to the airport, has simple clean rooms with shared toilets and mosquito net. **Chez Aïda** (☎ 910747; r \$US8) on the north side of town has four spacious rooms with fan and an excellent

little restaurant (mains around US\$2.20; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) that draws many NGO workers. The food next door at **Hôtel Le Palmier** (mains US\$0.75-2; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is even better. There are some excellent street-food vendors near the *gare voiture*.

N'zérékoré's *gare voiture* is located on the north side of town. There are taxis to/from Macenta (US\$4.20, 2½ hours), Kankan (US\$11, 12 hours) and Conakry (US\$18.50, 20 hours). Travel to Monrovia, Liberia, is a rough, all-day trip with many checkpoints: seek local advice before heading there. If Côte d'Ivoire becomes safe again, you can get taxis to Man via Sipilou.

BOSSOU

Researchers at the **Bossou Environmental Research Institute** (☎ 584761) track the chimpanzees living in the surrounding scenic hills, so your chances of finding them are excellent. A guide for a couple of hours in the forest costs US\$11.50, with half the money going towards the village. **Monkey Nest Guesthouse** (rUS\$1.20) at the base of Mont Gban has surely the cleanest, most comfortable rooms at this price in the country. Getting here from N'zérékoré is easy; take a *taxi brousse* to Lola (US\$1.50, 30 minutes) and then another to Bossou (US\$1, 30 minutes).

GUINEA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Conakry has lots of luxury properties and even more dives, plus plenty of choices in between, though nothing truly priced in the budget category. Upcountry, most towns have at least one place to stay, often with quite basic, but cheap, facilities. On the other hand, you can often get a lovely, comfortable room with bathroom and air-con for the same price as a grubby brothel in the capital.

A tourism tax of US\$1.20 per person applies to most top-end and some midrange hotels.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Overall, Guinea is a safe country, though crime has been on the increase in Conakry and small-scale tribal brawls flare up in the Forest Region occasionally. Armed robbery of vehicles has increased in the south, so don't travel at night.

Electricity, running water and phones (even mobiles) all have intermittent service. Most hotels have generators, though they usually don't run all night at cheapies.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Guinea Embassies & Consulates

Belgium (☎ 02-771 0126; 108 Auguste Reyers Blvd, 1030 Brussels)

Canada (☎ 613-789 8444; 483 Wilbrod St, K1N 6N1 Ottawa)

France (☎ 01 47 04 81 48; 51 Rue de la Faisanderie, 75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-2007 4330; Jägerstrabe 67-69, 10117 Berlin)

UK (☎ 020-7078 6087; 83 Victoria St, SW1H 0HW London)

USA (☎ 202-986 4300; 2112 Leroy Place NW, 20008 Washington, DC)

Guinea has embassies in the countries it borders. See the relevant chapters for more.

Embassies & Consulates in Guinea

The following embassies and consulates are located in Conakry.

Côte d'Ivoire (☎ 451082; Blvd du Commerce)

France (☎ 411655; cnr Blvd du Commerce & 8th Ave)

Germany (☎ 441506; www.conakry.diplo.de; 2nd Blvd)

Guinea-Bissau (☎ 422136; Route de Donka, Bellevue)

Japan (☎ 468510; Corniche Sud, Coléah)

Liberia (☎ 012-676526; Rue DI 258, Landreah)

Mali (☎ 461418; Corniche Nord, Camayenne)

Netherlands (☎ 415021; Rm 121, 2nd Ave, Novotel)

Senegal (☎ 409037; Corniche Sud, Coléah)

Sierra Leone (☎ 464084; Carrefour Bellevue, Dixinn)

UK (☎ 434715; Residence 2000, Villa 1, Corniche Sud, Coléah)

USA (☎ 411520; http://conakry.usembassy.gov; 2nd Blvd) A new embassy is under construction in Lambanyi.

PRACTICALITIES

- Guinea uses the metric system.
- Electricity is 220V/50Hz and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- Guinea's best-selling newspaper is the satirical weekly *Le Lynx*.
- The only TV station is the government-owned RTG, which shows a lot of sports and speeches.
- The BBC World Service is broadcast in French on FM and English on short wave.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

During May's **Fish Festival**, in the village of Baro (near Kouroussa), people try to catch (and release) sacred fish to get good luck. The **Hunting Festival** held annually in the Kankan area (time and location varies) lets Malinké men show off their shooting prowess. In September Mali-ville hosts the **Potato Festival**, a party for the farmers of the surrounding villages.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), Guinea celebrates the following national holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Declaration of the 2nd Republic 3 April

May Day 1 May

Market Women's Revolt 27 August

Referendum Day 28 September

Independence Day 2 October

INTERNET ACCESS

Access is widely available in Conakry and larger towns. Connections are fast in the capital and generally unreliable (though improving) in the countryside.

MAPS

The **Insitut Géographique National** (5th Blvd) near Corniche Nord in Conakry sells maps of Guinea as well as photocopies of topographical maps (scales 1:50,000 to 1:500,000).

MONEY

US dollars, euros and West African CFA francs are easily changed; rates are usually best in Conakry. Black-market dealers, widely used throughout Guinea, give better rates, and some even take travellers cheques. They are your only option to convert francs back into hard currency. Bicigui bank branches in most cities advance cash from Visa cards; its central Conakry branch has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

POST & TELEPHONE

Government-owned Sotelgui offices are in all large- and medium-sized towns (except Conakry), though most people use the many telecentres; shop around for the best rate. Sotelgui phone cards are another possibility, but it's not always easy to find a phone that accepts them. The quality of internet phone connections at cybercafés varies.

The postal service is unreliable.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Office National du Tourisme (p362) in Conakry can provide basic info. There are Ministère du Tourisme, de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Artisanat offices in many upcountry towns, but staff are as likely to hinder as help you.

VISAS

Visas are required by all, except members of Economic Community of West Africa States (Ecowas) countries, Morocco and Tunisia, and cost US\$25 to US\$50. You cannot get a visa upon arrival. Those issued in Africa are usually good for three months.

Visa Extensions

For an extension of up to three months (US\$40), go to the **Bureau of Immigration** (☎ 441339; cnr 1st Blvd & 8th Ave, Conakry).

Visas for Onward Travel

Côte d'Ivoire One-month single-entry visas cost US\$19 to US\$39, depending on your nationality. You need two photos and processing takes two days.

Guinea-Bissau One-month single-entry visas cost US\$16 and require two photos. Issued in three hours.

Liberia Three-month single-entry/multi-entry visas cost US\$45/58 for most nationalities. US citizens must buy a US\$100 one-year multiple-entry visa. You need two photos and a letter of request. Ready within two days.

Mali One-month single-entry visas cost US\$4; except for Americans, who must get a one-year multiple-entry visa for US\$100. Two photos are required and the visas can be ready on the same day if you go early. Reportedly you can also get a *laissez-passer* (travel permit) valid for up to a month for US\$2.50 at the gendarmerie in Kankan.

Senegal Most people do not need visas; those who do pay US\$3.40/7.80 for a one-month single-entry/three-month multiple-entry visa. They should be ready right away.

Sierra Leone One-month single-entry/three-month multiple-entry visas cost up to US\$100/150. You need one photo and they are ready within 72 hours, or you can pay US\$20 for rush service.

TRANSPORT IN GUINEA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Conakry-G'bessia International Airport is one of the most chaotic and exasperating in West Africa. Direct flights from Europe are available with **Air France** (☎ 413657; www.airfrance.com) and **SN Brussels** (☎ 413610; www.flysn.com) for around US\$1200 return.

DEPARTURE TAX

For international flights the departure tax is US\$5, but this is usually included in the cost of the ticket.

Within Africa, Conakry is connected to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Accra (Ghana), Bamako (Mali), Banjul (The Gambia), Bissau (Guinea-Bissau), Dakar (Senegal), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Niamey (Niger) and Praia (Cape Verde).

Land

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Transport continues to run to and from Côte d'Ivoire, but, until that country's cease fire becomes a peace deal, you shouldn't be on any of it. The primary route is between Lola and Man either via Gbakoré and Danané or via Sipilou and Biankouma. From Kankan it's easiest to go via Bamako because the road to Odienné via Mandiana is so bad. There's also a seldom-travelled route between Beyla and Odienné (via Sinko).

GUINEA-BISSAU

Horrible roads make travel between these two countries difficult. Most people using public transport get to Bissau via Labé and Gabú. You have to taxi hop beyond Koundara. With your own vehicle you can shave some distance, though not necessarily time, off this journey by going direct from Koumbia to Pitche. Minibuses go a couple of times a week (you might find a truck on other days) from Boké and Kamsar up the horrible road to Québo.

LIBERIA

Because of the large number of refugees in Guinea there is a lot of traffic to Liberia, but check the security situation before heading there. The primary route is south from N'zérékoré. *Taxis brousses* go frequently to the border town of Diéké (US\$4.50, three hours), where you can get a *taxi-moto* (motorcycle taxi) or walk the remaining 2km to Ganta to get a Monrovia-bound taxi. Plan on a full day's journey. The Macenta to Voinjama, Guéckédou to Foya, Koyama to Zorzor, and Lola to Yekepa routes are all on bad roads and have less reliable connections to Monrovia. For all of these routes you buy a single ticket, but change cars at the border.

MALI

The most frequent route to Bamako goes from Kankan (US\$15, seven hours) via Siguiri and the border at Kourémalé. The road is sealed and in excellent shape, except for a 50km stretch in Mali that is due to be upgraded soon. If you're in a hurry, *taxis brousses* also ply this route from Conakry (US\$26, 24 hours), departing from the Gare Voiture Siguiri in the Madina market. With your own 4WD you can also go from Kankan via Mandiana to Bougouni, or Mali-ville through Kita.

SENEGAL

Leaving Guinea, there are several *taxis brousses* daily for Diaoubé (US\$23, two days) from both Gare Voiture Bambeto and Gare Voiture Matam in Conakry. See also the Long Roads boxed text on p366.

SIERRA LEONE

The journey from Conakry to Freetown is pretty straightforward, and the final dirt section should be sealed soon. There are several *taxis brousses* daily (US\$13, seven hours) from both Gare Voiture Bambeto and Gare Voiture Matam in Conakry. A bus also goes to Freetown (US\$14) from Gare Voiture Matam on Tuesday and Friday. Taxis waiting at the border town of Pamelap also connect to most other large Sierra Leonean towns. All other routes – from Guéckédou to Koindu and Kailahun (for which we've heard reports of Sierra Leone border officials insisting travellers purchase visas even if they already have one), between Faranah and Kabala, and from Kindia to Medina Oula then on to Kamakwie (this route is closed when the Little Scarcies River runs high) – are on rough roads and are sparsely travelled.

River

During the rainy season barges run once a week or so between Siguiri and Bamako (Mali; US\$12). It's a one-day journey downstream and takes at least two days coming back up.

Sea

Boats go from Kamsar to Bissau (Guinea Bissau; US\$7) stopping in Cacine and Kamkhonde, where many passengers catch *taxis brousses* to complete their trip to the capital. There is no set schedule. Talk of restarting the ferry between Conakry and Freetown continues. Ask at the port.

GETTING AROUND

Taxis brousses (usually Peugeot station wagons) are the main way of getting around Guinea, which means most travellers will have to contend with two major hassles: terrible roads and severe overcrowding (10 or 11 passengers in a car made for seven, plus luggage, bananas, live goats and poultry, and a few more people on the roof). Although

minibuses are cheaper than taxis, they are just as overcrowded and take far longer to fill up. They also usually travel more slowly. Private buses connect Conakry to a few other cities; though cheaper and more comfortable than *taxis brousses*, they're slow and constantly breaking down. In Guinea the term *gare voiture* is used, rather than *gare routière*, for the bus and *taxi-brousse* park.

